

Post-stroke walking program improves stroke survivors' lives

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Regular, brisk walking after having a stroke could help boost your physical fitness, mobility and quality of life, according to research in the American Heart Association journal *Stroke*.

"Walking is a great way to get active after a stroke," said Carron Gordon, Ph.D., lead author of the study and a lecturer in the physical therapy department at University of the West Indies in Jamaica. "It's familiar, inexpensive, and it's something people could very easily get into."

Researchers divided 128 adult [stroke survivors](#) into a group that performed brisk outdoor walking three times a week for three months and a group that had therapeutic massage and no [supervised exercise](#).

Compared to the massage group, the walking group:

- Reported a 16.7 percent improvement in quality of life based on physical health.
- Walked 17.6 percent farther in a six-minute endurance test.
- Had a 1.5 percent lower [resting heart rate](#) (the massage group's resting heart rate was 6.7 percent higher).

After a stroke, many people lack energy and are afraid of falling while walking—withdrawing from meaningful activities like going to church, buying groceries and visiting friends and family, Gordon said.

Previous research has shown that improving physical activity without putting too much stress on your body can help achieve a higher quality of life after a stroke. But those studies evaluated treadmill walking and cycling.

The new study shows you can walk without exercise equipment at any convenient place in the community, Gordon said.

[Study participants](#) were from three Jamaican hospitals, had either an ischemic or [hemorrhagic stroke](#) six to 24 months before the study and could walk independently with or without a cane. The average age of the 70 women and 58 men was 64.

Before and after the study, researchers interviewed participants and measured their fitness and quality of life. They also monitored heart rate and blood pressure before and after each walking session.

Walking group participants were supervised by instructors during their walk. Eventually, friends or family members could walk along instead, until the participants were comfortable walking alone, Gordon said.

Although most study participants were blacks living in Jamaica, similar results can be expected in any ethnic or cultural group, Gordon said. However, the results can't be extended to patients with more severe effects or those unable to walk independently.

"Walking can help control blood pressure, reduce lipid or fat levels and help with weight control—all cardiovascular risk factors," Gordon said. "So doctors should encourage it for patients who have had a stroke."

The [American Heart Association](#) recommends at least 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous exercise (or some combination of both) for most people. For stroke survivors, the

association recommends aerobic exercise three to seven days a week, for 20 to 60 minutes, depending on fitness level.

Provided by American Heart Association

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